

**STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE
AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY WORK GROUP
MEETING NOTES
April 22, 2014**

Present: Bob Lokken, Chair; Anne Ritter, George Harad, Representative Donna Pence, Representative Reed DeMordaunt (via audio conference).

Others present: Marilyn Whitney

Bob Lokken called the meeting to order. He referred the group to his Memo dated April 14, 2014 which detailed a workflow plan to ensure that the tasks of the group were completed on time. He suggested that each subject (Accountability, Autonomy and Annual Planning) involve goal setting, research review, evaluation of options and drafting recommendations.

Anne Ritter also felt it was important to have an understanding of federal regulations and how they might limit or constrain recommendations of the group. Bob suggested that by modeling other states, many of those federal regulations have already been cleared. George Harad agreed that he wanted to remain open in thinking and then conform ideas as needed, rather than to focus too much on regulations. Marilyn Whitney pointed out that the 5-Star Rating System was developed within the federal regulations. In the latest round of waivers, certain elements need to be “tweaked,” and it was done successfully.

George Harad provided a handout which contained charts from Superintendent Don Coberly. Using a cut score of 500 on the SAT, the charts showed wide fluxuation among schools of differing socio-economic status. In talking about college/PTE/career readiness, the current thinking has leaned toward requiring proficiency, critical thinking and college/career readiness. George Harad sees a problem in measuring success solely on standards because the charts show such wide range that the standards could well be out of reach for some. He favors “continuous improvement” to assess proficiency. He also believes that a cut score of SAT 500 is too low. His focus is on changing the process so that districts are creating advanced opportunities for students.

Bob Lokken said that everyone can agree on proficiency, but how is it measured? Equally important is the forcing function – what keeps districts from ignoring the measurement. There must be ramifications for those who are overachieving, struggling and chronically underachieving.

Representative DeMordaunt said that both achievement and growth must be considered. But if one were to dominate, he would favor growth instead of an artificial bar, so that each student is his own cohort. Growth is a more fair measurement, while setting an arbitrary bar can carry unintended consequences.

The group discussed the pros and cons of growth as a measurement. George Harad feared that a system based on growth alone could build a system of low expectations. Bob Lokken said that some students can continue to grow and still graduate without the ability to go on. Ann Ritter spoke for the gifted students who hit an achievement bar but still should be challenged to do more. All agreed that middle school is an especially critical time for students. Bob Lokken said that the 60% Goal cannot be accomplished in a growth measurement without some sort of standard as well.

Representative DeMordaunt suggested that the group review more information on RIT scores and value-added to gain more information on growth and standards expectations. Anne Ritter expressed concern that schools be asked to do something they can actually implement instead of presenting them with more busy work that takes time away from teaching. Bob Lokken said that when he interviews the superintendents, he will ask them about value-added.

Bob Lokken reminded the group that they are charged at the state level. Last year's Task Force made clear that people, not institutions, need to be held accountable. It is not the State's job to hold teachers or principals accountable. Nonetheless, the constitution requires that a fair and uniform system be funded by the State. A district's board of directors is not constitutionally tied to the State but to the local electorate. The State provides a license for superintendents so has some say in who can and cannot hold that position. It is a leadership responsibility. Perhaps the State should worry about districts because they are using state funds, but it cannot punish the district if the leadership is the superintendent – the leadership needs to change instead. Bob Lokken suggested that the group focuses its structure on superintendents and that accountability be transferred to the local board. The only time the State would get involved is if a local district does not do its job. In Massachusetts, they ensure that the leader is in charge.

Anne Ritter said that measurements need to be up front and transparent and that a mechanism needs to be in place after initial certification to keep a superintendent on a five year track. Superintendent education programs need to be high quality.

George Harad spoke to the legalistic issue. The State does not have the ability to remove a board. In most districts, boards and superintendents share responsibility. If a district is underperforming, the State Superintendent could meet with the district superintendent and the board to discuss and offer resources and assistance.

Bob Lokken said that removing a credential is a Draconian measure. One of the biggest problems is that no clear measure exists to determine if a school is effective or not. People have more clarity about football scores than the performance of their school. Anne Ritter agreed that the 5-Star Rating system does not reflect how a school is doing.

Representative DeMordaunt agreed as well. He said that he is not wed to the 5-Star System. He agrees that transparency is important but transparency needs to be set up so that the local district doesn't just put the information out to the public and assume that the public will demand action. Some group or parent will switch the focus to athletics, which is not what the system is about. Whatever is set up needs to have some teeth at the State level because locals may not act with the focus that the State would like them to.

George Harad said that the end measurement [60% goal of post-secondary education] requires a focus on elementary and middle school. If you don't change the pipeline, you are not going to get to the 60% Goal. He agreed that the first level should be transparency so that districts know where they are. The second line should be assistance and training with resources they can call upon. People do not intend to fail.

Anne Ritter said that the State Department of Education (SDE) is starting to do that at multi-district levels. If a district does not call on resources, or is not implementing them, then a third level of oversight comes into play. Bob Lokken said that often the school is punished and the leadership is left in place. When Massachusetts set up the Accountability and Assistance Law, it put of a resource center available to all. He felt that it is the State's business to measure student growth.

Marilyn Whitney passed out the State Board of Education Strategic Plan for FY 2015-2019 and called attention to the benchmarks listed on p. 4. She said that these benchmarks are already in place and the State Board reviews them every year. Bob Lokken suggested that the group study these. They may be the right measures, and he asked about enforcement. Marilyn Whitney replied that the benchmarks went hand-in-hand with the 5-Star Rating system. Also, the SDE did put into place improvement resources, not just from the SDE, but from others districts as well. Regional math centers provide additional resources.

Discussion of agenda for next meeting:

Next Meeting: May 9, 1-3pm at OSBE offices.

Agenda items:

Review of 5-Star Rating System; members should review it and be prepared to ask questions. Elaine will post to Edmoto. TJ Bliss from SDE will be available.

Interviews with superintendents to dive into the mechanics of accountability – how are they doing it now, how effective is it, how would we change it. Discuss an annual improvement plan – one and three year plans as the mechanism.

Marilyn Whitney said that OSBE was going through Representative Wendy Horman's bill on strategic plans to see what is required. She suggested that the group look at examples of good plans.

Closing thoughts:

Bob Lokken said that Ryan Kerby worked with his third grade teachers to devise a plan to improve reading scores. The teachers got together and collaborated, not by classroom, but for all third graders which resulted in more creativity and accountability. That is why the State should not get below the district level.